DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 025 788 CG 003 078

By-Megargee, Edwin I.; Rosenquist, Carl M.

A Comparison of Delinquent and Nondelinquent Anglo-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Mexican Nationals.

American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.
Pub Date 1 Sep 68
Note-14p.; Speech presented at the American Psychological Association Convention, San Francisco, California, August 30 through September 3, 1968.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80
Descriptors-*Cultural Factors, *Delinquency Causes, *Delinquent Identification, *Delinquents, *Ethnic Groups, Family Attitudes, Family Environment, Mexican Americans, One Parent Family, Parent Role

Some 50 adjudicated male delinquents, aged 12-17, and 50 nondelinquent comparison subjects from the same lower class neighborhoods were selected from each of three cultural groups: (1) Mexican nationals, (2) Mexican-Americans, and (3) Anglo-Americans. Sociological and demographic data were collected. A standard psychological test battery, including measures of intelligence and objective and projective personality tests devised for this cross-cultural, cross-national study, was administered to each subject. Each boy was also examined by a doctor. The delinquents were found to be more antagonistic toward authorities and had a more negative world view. On the question of values, there were broad areas of agreement between delinquent and nondelinquent groups. Some differences were found in the area of achievement. Highly significant differences in diastolic blood pressure may indicate differentiating patterns of autonomic responsitivity to stress. Families of the delinquents were perceived to be less cohesive, more hostile and rejecting, and overly strict, with some deviant or antisocial values. The delinquents' lower achievement motivation may suggest a familial transmission of attitudes toward school. The finding that the same basic factors differentiate delinquents from nondelinquents in all three samples has important theoretical and practical implications. (IM)

ED025788

A Comparison of Delinquent and Nondelinquent Anglo-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Mexican Nationals

Edwin I. Megargee
Florida State University
and
Carl M. Rosenquist
University of Texas[1]

Juvenile delinquency is an increasingly serious problem throughout the world. Studies by sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and physiologists have isolated numerous factors which are associated with juvenile crime. Dozens of competing theories have been developed to explain the origin and dynamics of delinquency. Most of this research has focused on lower class delinquents in the urban areas of the Northeastern United States. Some studies have compared delinquents with control groups of lower class nondelinquents; others have used middle class comparison groups and still others have simply described delinquent samples in a quasi-anthropological fashion.

There are three basic problems with much of the work which has been done to date. First, the interpretation of many studies is difficult because inappropriate comparison groups were used.

---

[1]From S. D. Peizer (Chm.), Cross-cultural approaches to the study of delinquency. Symposium presented at the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, September 1968. A full account of this study can be found in Rosenquist, C. M. and Megargee, E. I., Delinquency in three cultures. Austin: University of Texas Press, in press.

CA003078

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Delinquency has frequently been confounded with social class so that it has been impossible to determine whether the results obtained were artifacts of class differences. The untangling of these two sources of variance is of considerable practical importance. If there is little or no difference between the culture of delinquency and the culture of poverty then it would behoove us to devote our primary efforts to attacking the problems of the poor, with the reasonable expectation that this would also solve the problem of juvenile crime. If, on the other hand, the problems of poverty and delinquency are separate and distinct, then separate and distinct programs are required.

A second problem has been the narrow range of many studies. Sociologists, psychologists and physicians have been prone to confine themselves to the variables which fall within their own discipline, overlooking the possible relationships with variables falling in territory claimed by another discipline, or even another theoretical position in the same discipline. While individual studies of the relationship between delinquency and such single factors as intelligence, parental divorce, or defective vision are valuable, it has become increasingly important to compliment this research with broader studies investigating a wider range of sociological, psychological and physical variables in order to determine how these factors might interact. The psychological finding that a delinquent sample has a lower mean IQ than a non-delinquent sample takes on considerably more meaning if it is interpreted in conjunction with the sociological observation that more of the delinquents' fathers are unemployed and a medical

report that malnutrition and anemia are higher in the delinquent sample.

A third major problem is that most studies have been conducted upon a single cultural group, usually white urban delinquents from the Northeastern United States. Since delinquency is a socially defined phenomenon, the question arises as to whether the findings from studies on this delinquent population can be generalized to delinquents in other regions and from other ethnic or cultural groups. Pilot projects which explore the effectiveness of programs for delinquency prevention or rehabilitation in a given area are often based on the assumption that this same sort of a program, if proven successful, can be applied in other areas, or to other cultural groups, with equal effectiveness. Thus far, however, there have been few data collected to justify this assumption.

It was because of problems such as these that the present research was undertaken.

Method

Subjects

Fifty adjudicated male delinquents, aged 12-17, and fifty nondelinquent comparison subjects from the same lower class neighborhoods were selected from each of three cultural groups: 1) Mexican nationals living in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico; 2) Mexican-Americans (hereafter called "Latins") living in San Antonio, Texas; and 3) North Americans (hereafter called "Anglos") also living in San Antonio. San Antonio and Monterrey are both industrial cities equidistant from the border. This provided

three samples of delinquents and nondelinquents whose cultural backgrounds were increasingly dissimilar from the samples studied in the Northeastern United States which have been the subjects of most prior research. It also provided two samples, the Anglos and the Mexicans, who were the members of the dominant cultural group in their locales, and one alien minority group, the Latins. The last sample was particularly important because some sociological theorists have hypothesized that the conflict of cultural norms and expectations found in such minority groups can lead to "anomie", a confusion about values, which might cause delinquency.

Procedures

The data collected ranged over a wide spectrum. They included sociological and demographic variables such as the marital history of the boys' families, the number of older and younger brothers and sisters, church attendance and denominational preferences of parents and subjects, the socioeconomic status of the fathers' jobs and the highest grades in school attained by the boys and their fathers and mothers.

A standard psychological test battery including measures of intelligence and objective and projective personality tests devised for this cross-cultural, cross-national study was individually administered to each of the 300 subjects. Included in this test battery were 1) a complete Wechsler Intelligence scale; 2) the "Choices Test", a specially devised procedure which tapped long range planning ability, the capacity to postpone immediate need gratification and aspiration level; 3) the "Offenses Test", a test of values in which the subjects were asked to judge the relative

seriousness of various delinquent acts; 4) the "Card Sort Test", which assessed attitudes toward family members, authorities and school; 5) the "Cartoon Test" in which the subjects were asked to indicate what a parent's response would be in various tense situations with a teenaged boy; and 6) the "Picture Story Test" in which the boys were asked to tell stories about four cards from the Symonds Picture-Story Test. Finally, each boy was given a thorough physical examination by a medical doctor.

Results

The results of this investigation, which took over 10 years to complete, are obviously well beyond the scope of the 15 minutes which remain to me. The complete report will be available in a book soon to be published by the University of Texas Press. In the time that remains I shall attempt to give you a brief overview of the findings.

At the outset of the study we expected that the delinquents and the nondelinquents in the three cultures would differ from each other in certain areas. Our first major expectation was that the delinquents would have more antagonism against authorities in general and against their fathers in particular. This expectation was confirmed. The delinquents in all three cultures were found to be more disrespectful and antagonistic towards their fathers and other authorities than were the nondelinquents. These attitudes were more pronounced in the Mexican and Latin delinquents than in the Anglo. The cross-cultural differences in this pattern suggested that the more the culture stresses the father's authoritarian role in the family, particularly at the expense of

the mother's, the more closely will delinquency be associated with paternal disrespect. Some scholars have emphasized how culturally sanctioned paternal authoritarianism can inhibit delinquency. Our data suggest that if this authority is lacking in such a culture, perhaps because of a broken home, then the failure of the strong patriarchal culture to provide alternative socializing influences might make the father's absence from home more conducive to delinquency than would have otherwise have been the case.

It was expected that the attitudes of the delinquents towards their mothers would be more positive than their attitudes toward the fathers. This generally seemed to be the case in all three cultures. However there were signs of considerable ambivolence in the attitudes toward the mother, particularly in the Latin and Mexican delinquents. In the typical Mexican family, the mother is regarded almost as if she were sacred. As a sex, however, women are held in poor regard and the woman who masculinizes herself is disparaged. The Mexican woman who is forced by circumstances to become the head of a household and raise male children, as was the case with 52% of the Mexican delinquents' mothers, is thus placed in an extremely difficult position. It is likely that her son, in addition to the problems in identification faced by any fatherless adolescent boy, would also have more difficulty maintaining his respect for his mother in the face of this social disapproval than would a boy raised in Anglo society where a mateless mother's position is more socially accepted.

The second broad expectation was that the delinquents would

have a more negative world view--that they would see others as being more hostile and rejecting and that they would in turn be more suspicious. There was some evidence of this in the data for all three samples as well. There was no evidence that these feelings were stronger among the delinquents in one cultural group than in another.

A third expectation was that the delinquents would have more antisocial values and attitudes. It was also expected that the most confusion and disagreement over values would be found in the Latin sample which was exposed to conflicting demands by the Anglo and Mexican cultural traditions. The data generally indicated broad areas of agreement on values between the delinquent and non-delinquent groups in all three cultures. It seemed clear that it was an oversimplification at best to attribute delinquency to the effects of a subculture with vastly different values. Nevertheless, there was significantly more disagreement about values within the delinquent groups and, as expected, this was strongest among the delinquent Latins.

A fourth general expectation was that there would be significant differences between the delinquents and nondelinquents in the general area of achievement. This was expected to take three forms. First it was expected that the nondelinquents would have achieved less in school. This expectation was confirmed in all three samples. Secondly, the ability to achieve as measured by the Wechsler Intelligence scales was significantly lower among the delinquents in the Anglo and Latin samples. This was not found to be the case amongst the delinquents in the Mexican sample,

however, possibly because of biased sampling.

A third aspect of achievement is the ability to defer immediate need gratification and to think in terms of long range goals. These characteristics were also more evident among the nondelinquents than delinquents. For example one part of the "Choices Test" required the subjects to indicate how they would spend various sums of money. The slide shows the responses to the question as to how they would spend 25¢ or 20 centavos. The nondelinquents in all three samples were significantly more likely to indicate that they would spend this money on such things as school supplies or would save it, while the delinquents were more likely to spend the money immediately for treats such as candy or cigarettes. This demonstrated greater ability to postpone need gratification on the part of the nondelinquents.

The last area in which individual differences between delinquents and nondelinquents were explored was that of physical fitness. Many physically based theories of delinquency have been proposed. Most of these hypothesize that the delinquent will be found to be an inferior biological organism either because of innate differences or because of environmental deprivation. There was no such evidence for physical inferiority in the results of the medical examinations in any of the samples. Few significant differences were found and those which were found as often as not indicated that the delinquent was superior to the nondelinquent.

The one physical variable which did appear to warrant further investigation was blood pressure. Highly significant differences in diastolic blood pressure were obtained that were consistent

with speculations by physiological psychologists as to the patterns of autonomic arousal which might differentiate those who express emotions such as anger from those who suppress them. If there are physical differences between delinquents and nondelinquents, as so many have suggested, it appears to the present investigators that such differences are most likely to be found in the area of autonomic responsivity to stress.

In addition to exploring differences in the individual characteristics of delinquents and nondelinquents, we also compared the families of the delinquent and nondelinquent subjects in the three samples. Some important differences were found here as well. The first was in the area of family cohesiveness, to use the Gluecks' term. In all three cultures, the delinquents families were found to be much less cohesive in a number of salient respects. For example, as the slide shows, there was a higher incidence of broken homes and marital instability among the parents of the delinquent subjects in all three samples.

A lack of familial cohesiveness is not manifested solely by divorce or desertion, of course. A home may be formally intact but still racked with dissension, recrimination and hostility. The psychological test data indicated that there was much less respect and warmth in the delinquents' families than in the non-delinquents' families in all three samples. We have already discussed the fact that there was considerable disrespect of the father among the Latin and Mexican delinquents. The data also indicated more feelings of rejection among the delinquents in all three samples and suggested that there was more dissension and quarreling and less communication among the delinquents' families.

Thus this lack of cohesiveness, that has been found to characterize delinquents in the urban Northeast, characterizes them equally as well in the Southwest and in Mexico. This cross-cultural generality was particularly significant in the case of the Latin delinquents, for it demonstrated that their deviant behavior was not solely the result of the external social pressures applied on minority groups as some have hypothesized.

The second major familial area was the attitude of the parents towards their children. Is the child valued as an individual with his own needs and personality, or is the parents' behavior towards him determined more by their needs and convenience? While we did not study the parents directly, the psychological test responses suggested that the delinquents perceived their parents as being colder, more rejecting and more hostile toward them than did the nondelinquents.

A third familial factor which was investigated was the nature and quality of parental discipline. It was evident that the delinquents in all three samples regarded their parents as being overly strict and impossible to please. While the truth of these attitudes was, of course, impossible to assess, it did indicate that this attitude which is so common among Anglo delinquents is not limited to North American culture. Some responses to the "Cartoon Test" were indicative of attitudes toward parental discipline. As the slide shows, in all three cultures more delinquents depicted one or both parents as using threats of punishment when confronted with undesirable behavior while more nondelinquents indicated the parents would use reasoning techniques. Other data

indicated that the delinquents' parents were less likely to be aware of their sons' whereabouts. The sociological data rather unexpectedly provided additional findings relevant to discipline. It was found that there was a significantly higher proportion of older siblings in the nondelinquent Mexican group. A similar trend was found in the Latin sample but no such pattern was evident amongst the Anglos. In the traditional Mexican household the older siblings assume an important role in the supervision and discipline of their younger brothers and sisters. The fact that the nondelinquents had more older siblings suggests that this extra supervision and discipline might serve to inhibit delinquency.

A fourth area in which familial differences were expected was in the socialization of the parents. In all three samples the delinquents were more likely to attribute antisocial or deviant values to parents than were the nondelinquents. This could represent projection on the part of the sons. However, the sociological data were consistent with this perception indicating that the delinquents' parents attended church less regularly and had dropped out of school earlier in addition to having greater marital instability already noted. This ability to crosscheck findings demonstrates one of the advantages of widescale investigations encompassing a number of variables.

A fifth area which was studied was the achievement motivation of the parents. As we have just noted, the delinquents' parents had dropped out of school significantly earlier than the nondelinquents' parents. This indicated a familial transmission of attitudes toward school and suggested that the delinquents' lower

achievement motivation was part of a basic family pattern rather than being a symptom of rebellion against parental standards.

Implications of the results

The most important finding of the present investigation was that in spite of the many differences between the cultural groups, the same basic factors differentiated the delinquents from the nondelinquents in all three samples. While there were differences in emphasis, the similarities far outweighed these differences. This means that delinquency cannot be ascribed to fundamentally different factors in the different cultures sampled. The Anglo delinquent was not basically different from the Latin or the Mexican delinquent. Nor would it appear that delinquency in one sample stemmed more from basically different causes than did delinquency in another sample. This may be disappointing to those who seek new or different explanations of delinquency, but for those of us who are searching for lawful regularities in behavior it came as a relief. If the findings in this Southwestern Anglo sample had differed considerably from those reported for other Anglo samples in the literature, or if the patterns in the Latin or Mexican samples had been quite different from those found in the Anglo, our hopes for ever finding general patterns or deriving broad theoretical principles would have been dashed.

To be sure, some differences were found between the various ethnic samples. The data indicated that these differences were not primarily the result of cultural differences in ethical or moral values. Instead, differences in family patterns and childrearing methods appeared to lie at the root of the cultural differences

which were obtained. In particular, the emphasis on authoritarian paternalism in Mexico seemed to foster a pattern of delinquency in which disrespect of parents and other authorities was the central aspect.

The fact that many highly significant differences were found between the delinquents and nondelinquents in all three samples was also of major importance. This indicated that the differences noted in other studies were not simply artifacts of comparing lower class delinquents with middle class nondelinquents. While some of the patterns noted for delinquents are more common in lower class culture, there still remain important differences between delinquent and nondelinquent members of the lower class.

The data also had important implications for various theories of delinquency. In particular they tended to be most consistent with theories such as Reckless', which emphasizes the interaction of social and personal controls, and least supportive of physiological theories which attribute delinquent behavior to defective endocrine functioning, innate biological differences and the like. Unfortunately time does not permit us to work through the ramifications of the implications of these data for all the various sociological and psychological theories.

There were also important practical implications. The similarity between the patterns of delinquency in these three samples suggested that programs of prevention and rehabilitation proven successful in one area or in one group could be applied to other groups in other areas with reasonable hopes of success. This is a most encouraging finding. If each sample had been

unique, it would have implied that solutions to the problems of that sample would probably not be applicable to other delinquent groups. However, the present data instead suggest that there is a possibility of developing general principles for working with delinquent boys.

The fact that significant differences were found between the delinquent and nondelinquent groups even after neighborhoods had been matched indicated that the problem of delinquency is not the same as the problem of poverty or lower class culture. This means that programs aimed at solving the problems of poverty cannot be expected to eliminate delinquency. Delinquency prevention must take on the task of coping not only with poverty, which undoubtedly does constitute a pressure towards deviance, but also with those other factors which help determine whether or not a poor boy becomes delinquent.